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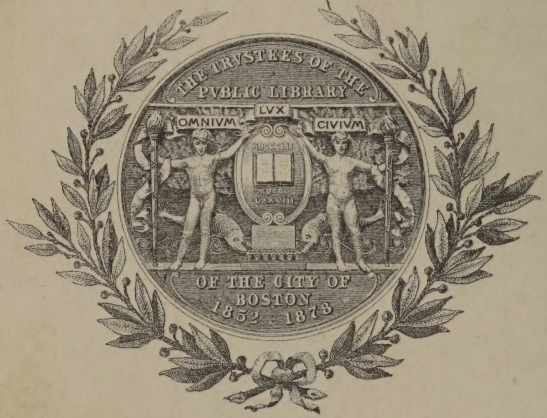

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Jean de Bloch

and

"The Future of War"

By Edwin D. Mead

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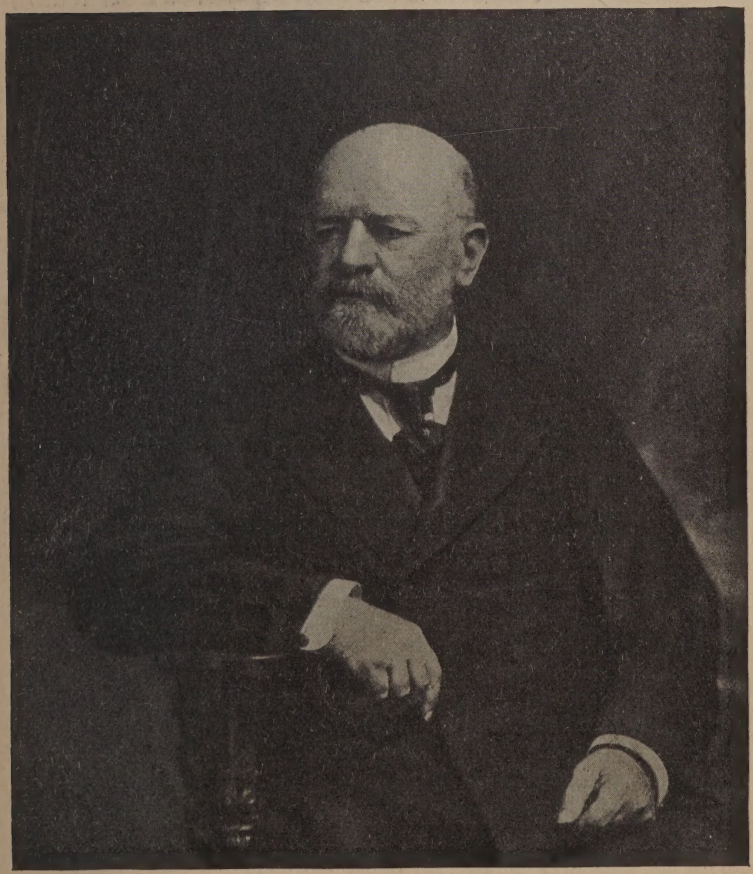

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JEAN DE BLOCH AND "THE FUTURE OF WAR."

BY EDWIN D. MEAD.

IT is a great mistake to think, as so many people in our time are apt to do when some terrible war overwhelms some part of the world, that war is on the increase among men and that we are probably on the eve of a portentous new era of it. The temptation to think so is of course especially strong when two or three such wars come at the same time, waged by enlightened nations which we had fondly trusted had got beyond such wickedness and folly. But there is no warrant for the belief. There is seldom real warrant for any fear that the world generally is going backward, although it would be stupid not to see that there come many days which are far behind many yesterdays in insight, in ideals and in conduct. The long view is generally the encouraging view, the view of progress,—and that whether it is very long or not quite so long.

We have just entered a new century. As one looks back over the nineteenth century, which has closed, as one reads perhaps some brief historical survey of the century, it is worth while to ask oneself whether one would rather live in 1800 or 1900, in the world pictured in the first pages of the book or that pictured in the last pages. The serious man can give but one answer. The England and France and Germany and Italy and Spain of the end of the century were, when every possible deduction has been made on particular points, vastly more habitable, better places to live in, than the same countries at the beginning of the century. Henry Adams in the first half of the first volume of his history of the United States during the administration of Jefferson paints a masterly picture of the life of our own people in 1800. Every aspect of the social and intellectual life of the time is treated with marvellous fulness of detail and in the most graphic and impressive way; and there is an element of hope and buoyancy, of prophecy and promise, pervading the pages, which is at once inspiring and sobering. Yet surely one would rather live in the United States at the beginning of the twentieth century than at the beginning of the nineteenth. The century has been on the whole emphatically a period of progress. The same was true of the century before, and of the century before that.

What has been true concerning progress in general during the last few centuries has been especially true of progress out of the habit of war toward the habit of peace. Events at the close of the nineteenth century have been indeed deplorable; they were also deplored—and this is the significant thing—more than such events were ever deplored before. The body of protest against unnecessary and unrighteous wars becomes steadily larger, bolder and more outspoken; the public conscience is more troubled by them; more and more men perceive their wastefulness and wrong and discern the more excellent way; and to-morrow the total of protesting insight and morality shall be great enough

(Reprinted from the New England Magazine, May, 1903.)

to tip the balance and hold the tempted, ruffling nation to self-restraint, respect for others, and respect for civilization. There was much less war in Christendom during the nineteenth century than during the eighteenth, and there will be less during the twentieth century than during the nineteenth. The steady and sure progress of the world is toward the supplanting of the ways of greed and violence among nations by the methods of reason, legality and mutual regard. As one travels over Europe, one is never far from some great battlefield. In Scotland one remembers how half a dozen centuries ago one clan was continually fighting with another, this group of clans warring with that, or all were leagued together against one Edward or another advancing with his archers from beyond the Tweed. The English armies fighting at Falkirk and Bannockburn and Halidon were straightway—they or their successors—in France fighting at Crecy and Poitiers and Agincourt. The wars between England and France were interminable; and so were the wars between France and other folk. There were civil wars and religious wars and wars of succession, seven-years wars and thirty-years wars and hundred-years wars. War was the regular vocation of nations, the profession of arms the chief profession, peace merely an occasional respite, in no sense to be reckoned on or presumed to endure as the natural condition of things. If we glance over the whole history of mankind, from 1496 B. C. to the year 1861 of our era, 3,357 years, we find there but 227 years of peace—thirteen years of war for every year of peace.

All this in the last centuries has been fundamentally changed. Europe bends under the burden of her great armies and multiplies her costly battleships, and we say that it is wasteful and barbarous; but the soldiers and ships are almost never used. We grieve and blush at the shameful subjugation of the Boer republics and the Philippines; but these wars were anachronisms, sporadic survivals of courses common and orthodox three hundred years ago, when men did not blush for them, but not typical of the tendencies and civilization of the present age. The true exponent of the world's best judgment and increasing purpose and policy, as the twentieth century begins, is not the warring in Luzon and the Transvaal, but the Hague Tribunal. For a century the states in the United States, because we have had a Supreme Court, have settled there, and not by combat, their boundary disputes and other quarrels, graver often than many which have plunged European nations into war, while most of us have not known even of the fact of litigation. To-day, because now an International Tribunal exists, the Venezuelan imbroglio is referred to it, which else might have gone on to the dread arbitrament of arms. Such references will multiply; the legal way instead of the fighting way will become easy, will become common, will become instinctive, will become universal; war will hasten after the duel, to be loathed and to be laughed at, to be despised by gentlemen, to cease to be respectable, and finally to cease to be at all; the cannon will follow the rack to the chamber of horrors; and nations when they disagree will not go into battle, but into court. This is the sure end of the process which the broad survey of history reveals. The critical student of war becomes the sure prophet of peace.

Most confident and most exact of all prophets of peace was the great student of war who died just as our new century's second year began.

Jean de Bloch prophesied because he knew. He was not only the greatest student of war in this time, but in all time; and his epoch-making book, "The Future of War," will do more, and has already done more, than any other book which was ever written, save Grotius's "Rights of War and Peace" alone, to promote the tendencies which make for the world's peace and order and humaneness; far more than any other to open the eyes of Europe to the burden and the blight of the war system, to its unfitness and falsity as an instrument for achieving justice, and its menace to the economic and social life of nations to-day. For America especially is his message important. She has played with the temptations of jingoism and militarism and has yielded to them; but she has not done it again and again. She feels, as others have felt, the lust for territorial aggrandizement, which Gladstone has so well called the original sin of nations; but the indulgence of it has not become a tyrannizing habit and conceded policy. Greed, vanity and bluster are within her borders as within others, base dreams of armies and great navies, and recreant promptings to go forth conquering and to conquer; but she has not chosen the war system for her own, she is not a military nation, she is still the one great peace power of the world, and if she is wise in time she can save herself from the errors and sins of which Europe begins to repent; she can keep herself from falling back into the barbarism from which Europe is painfully emerging; and, knowing well that a nation's deadliest sin is to thwart or check the rising hopes and best endeavors of the great family of nations, can do more than any other to hasten the fulfilment of the prophecy of international order and justice, which now, delayed or hastened, is so sure, and the process of which is history's dominant and most sacred interest as this second Christian millennium ripens and rounds. To this end there is no other modern word so full of instruction, of admonition and of incitement as that of Jean de Bloch in "The Future of War."

"The Future of War" has made so deep an impression and won so great a fame that with it exclusively the name of Jean de Bloch is identified in many minds. Most indeed think of him as a man of one book. He was a man of many books; and these books deal with many and varied interests—for Bloch's busy, crowded life touched the world at many points. He was not simply a student of war; he was also a student of finance, of railroads, of agriculture, of industry, of economy, of society and politics. His life was one of the fullest, the most industrious and the most productive lives in this energetic and prolific modern time. It was also one of the most remarkable and romantic, hardly any other in this age of striking biographies presenting in its course sharper or more dramatic contrasts. From poverty to princely fortune, from the lowest social station to the highest, from peddler to imperial councillor, from ignorance and dearth of opportunity to mastery of knowledge and the teaching of the teachers, from obscurity to world renown, from the ostracism of the Polish Jew, the most pathetic man without a country in the whole modern world, to universal honor as prophet to the great family of nations,—such were some of the contrasts in the life of Jean de Bloch.

The life began at Radom in Poland, perhaps a hundred miles south of Warsaw. It began in 1836, more than a generation after Kosciusko fell wounded in the last heroic struggle and Poland's independence was finally destroyed—"Oh, bloodi-

est picture in the book of time!" It was not till 1817 that Kosciusko himself died in exile; and the young Polish Jew must have grown up among memories still strong of the "assassination of the nation" and among men not a few of whom in their youth had taken part in the tragical resistance. Born in 1836, Jean de Bloch lived till 1902; and into the sixty-six years there went, as one of his friends well said, practical activities which might have profitably occupied a dozen lives.

His first activity was that of a peddler. He actually earned his bread, we read, by hawking his wares about the streets of Warsaw. Saving a little money from his earnings, he set up shop as a money-broker. But he was cut out for something very different from this. By sudden fortune he won ten thousand dollars in a state lottery. Many another Polish Jew would have counted this the providential foundation for bigger brokerage. Jean de Bloch hailed it as foundation for larger life; and he knew that the way to larger life was the way of knowledge. "The first observation I made in life," he said to a friend in his last years, "was that education, culture, is the only passport to success; and as it was not bestowed upon me by others, I resolved to obtain it for myself." He had not even been taught by others to read and write; he had taught himself. He had read such books as he had been able to buy or to borrow; but his education when he now left Warsaw for Berlin was the slightest and rudest. In Berlin he spent three years, working with all the force of his intense nature. For languages he had a special passion; and he was finally able to speak English, German, French and Russian, and to write rapidly and correctly in the last three, while in his own Polish, which he always loved the most, he was forcible and eloquent.

Returning to Warsaw, he obtained a position in a bank, and soon had a bank of his own. With the passports of success denied to most men of his race in Russia, his rise was now rapid. He married a rich heiress, a daughter of the house of Kronenberg, famous bankers; and this alliance greatly strengthened his financial resources and his social prestige. It also greatly stimulated and enriched his personal life; for his wife was a woman of rare beauty and accomplishments, and their home became a brilliant social centre. More and more it grew to be the recognized headquarters of every high philanthropic and intellectual interest. It is largely due to M. de Bloch, said one who knew him well, after his death, that Warsaw, in spite of many disadvantages, has kept its position as the most civilized and social community in the Russian Empire. His interests almost from the first were world-wide. He was a constant traveller —he visited England nearly every year from his early manhood till his death—and his business relations ramified to every European capital; and there was no narrow nor provincial thinking in that Warsaw home.

The banking business grew until Bloch became the very Rothschild of the Polish metropolis. A deep student of finance, his views were sought by the Russian government. He was raised to the nobility. He became a financial intermediary between the Czar's ministers and the banking fraternity. He financed thousands of miles of railroads for the State. More than that, he built and administered them. The organization and working of railroads had been the first subject of large practical importance to which he had devoted thorough study; and it was his exhaustive work upon "Russian

Railways," published in two volumes, in both Russian and French, which first drew to him the attention of the imperial government, as it had done that of the leading critics and students of railway science in and out of Russia. He was recognized as one of the foremost men in the railway world. The vast railway enterprises which he carried out successfully were triumphs over difficulties almost unknown in western Europe. He was appointed manager-in-chief of the entire railway system connecting the Black Sea and the Baltic. He was made member of the Learned Committee of the Ministry of Finances, which post he held to the end of his life; and for many years his influence upon the economic legislation of the empire was constant and far-reaching.

It was not railways and banking alone which occupied him. He became the head of the lumber and sugar trades of Poland. He was the employer of thousands of men and president of many great industrial companies. Every industrial interest of Poland had his interest and sympathy. The welfare of the poorer classes was constantly upon his heart; he carried out various great philanthropic projects; and his deep sense of the need of a better social and industrial order inspired many of his economic writings and was an imperative and pervading motive in his studies of war. When the awful amount, over a billion dollars a year, now wasted in maintaining the armies of Europe in readiness for a war which can never be waged, is liberated and applied to the education and general welfare of the people, he felt that a great constructive new era would dawn. The proportion of money now spent on education compared with that spent on war is small. Ninety per cent of the Russian recruits cannot even read. "I have been attracted to this study of war," said M. de Bloch, "as much from the desire to improve the condition of the people as from any other source. Hence my book took in part the shape of an investigation of the moral, social and material conditions in which the masses of the Russian peasants pass their lives. It is a painful picture." Only a little less painful did he find the picture of the life of the poor the world over; and the resources of civilization, he charged, have hardly yet been drawn upon to improve it. With such a picture ever before us, the waste of our resources in war and in useless armies and navies is a crime against humanity.

The man of affairs and the student were indissolubly bound together in Jean de Bloch. His literary activity was enormous; and when we remember that this represented the hours of recreation snatched from the crowded business life which has been outlined, it is the more surprising. His first work on the Russian railways, two volumes, chiefly statistical, was published in 1875. Three years later appeared his more important work, in five volumes, on "The Influence of Railways upon the Economic Condition of Russia," a detailed study of the effect of the new railway system upon the social and industrial organization of the Russian people. Three years more, and there came his "History of Russian Finance in the Nineteenth Century," four volumes, revealing his extraordinary knowledge and grasp of the political and financial problems of the empire. In the same comprehensive way he treated "The Comparative Economic Conditions of the Russian Provinces"; and this four-volume work was followed by volumes upon the condition of agriculture in Russia and Poland—Bloch was an expert in anything relating

to agriculture—and by a special volume on "Agricultural Banks in Russia and Abroad," the latter work proving the beginning of a great movement which has produced most beneficial results. All this amazing literary output falls within a period of fifteen years; and it was, as has been already emphasized, the accompaniment of a business life absorbed in enterprises of the broadest scope and making constantly the heaviest demands. But it was this immense experience and practical responsibility, conjoined with these searching and exhaustive studies of the economic and political conditions of Russia and Europe, which schooled and fitted M. de Bloch to write precisely the book which "The Future of War" is, a book not only to fortify and inspire the haters of war and the workers for international order, but to command the attention of the world's economists and financiers and startle all the crowns and cabinets of Europe.

From his youth Jean de Bloch had studied war, and many pamphlets on miltary problems had come from his hand. He was a lifelong advocate of peace. But it was his great experience as a man of affairs and his long contemplation of the economic questions of Europe that revealed to him the extent of the revolution in the conditions of modern life which affect the problems of war. It was while he was investigating Russian agriculture and publishing his books about it that he began to write "The Future of War." Agriculture, finance, transportation, the changed industrial system, the new social strivings, every field in which he had learned and labored, taught him the recklessness of the modern European nation which should provoke war with any of its strong neighbors. He had drawn up schemes for the provisioning of his own Warsaw in time of war, and finding what this involved had proceeded to the larger problems in the same field. War was no longer a mere military thing, in large degree distinct from the rest of a people's life. In the complex modern world it involved everything; and to showing the nations the extent and manner in which this is true, Bloch devoted his labors as no man had ever done before. Some one has said that "The Future of War" might have been more appropriately entitled "A Cyclopædia of Modern Life," so sweeping and comprehensive is the range of its four thousand pages. Not only does it deal with war itself from every point of view, with the long history of the movement for its abolition, and with discussion of every probable cause of international strife, but it contains a thorough comparative exposition of the moral and political as well as social and economic conditions of the six Great Powers of Europe, with reference to the problem of war. "It sums up everything," says Bloch's English friend, Mr. Long, "from the consequences of Bismarckism to the nutritive value of a Russian navvy's food. To use an expression invented by Macaulay, 'nothing was too great or too little for it.'"

And what is its central thought and purpose? I have said that this great student of war was a prophet of peace. The main contention of his famous book, "The Future of War," is that war between any of the really great and equal powers has no future, that a decisive war between such powers has now become an impossibility. In the new condition of things war would imply suicide for almost every nation. Economic ruin would impose its cessation. Almost no great European state can now feed itself. Prolonged war would reduce a whole nation to the condition of a besieged

city; it would bring industrial paralysis and a strain which could not be borne. Every European country is already honeycombed with social discontent and revolt against the burdens of militarism; and "no patriotism could be proof against universal starvation."

But while the new economic conditions tend to shorten war, making it a burden unendurable, the new military conditions tend to prolong it. With the new weapons and relations, war between two really great powers would last for years, if the economic conditions permitted, before decisive advantages could be gained. A war like that of 1870, between France and Prussia, is to-day a wild impossibility.

"The soldier by natural evolution," says M. de Bloch, "has so perfected the mechanism of slaughter, that he has practically secured his own extinction. He has made himself so costly that mankind can no longer afford to pay for his maintenance, and he has therefore transferred the sceptre of the world from those who govern its camps to those who control its markets."

He shows how for centuries after the invention of gunpowder there was next to no progress in firearms. The cannon used at Trafalgar differed little from those used against the Armada. The needle gun and breech-loading cannon marked the beginning of the end. The ordinary soldier fires twelve times as many shots per minute as in 1870; with its great precision and penetrative power, his rifle is forty times as efficient. The French artillery to-day is more than a hundred times as deadly as in 1870. A seventy-pound bomb thirty years ago would have burst into two fragments; to-day, charged with the new explosives, it breaks up into twelve hundred, hurled with much greater velocity, and destroying all life within six hundred feet of the point of explosion. Smokeless powder and the modern rifle make a thousand men in defence equal to ten thousand in offence. The modern army is immense. Germany could mobilize 2,500,000 men in a great European war, France as many, Russia more, the expense and magnitude of their operations being incalculable. Armies in battle can no longer mass in great phalanxes, as in the days of Waterloo and Leipzig, or even of Sedan and Gettysburg; no book on tactics ten years old is of any value; and the conditions which made battle thrilling and picturesque for the individual soldier of but a generation ago have forever passed away. "At one time," as Bloch strongly states it, "war appealed to the imagination of man, and the poets and painters found no theme so tempting as depicting the heroism of the individual warrior, whose courage and might often turned the tide of battle and decided the destiny of nations. All that has long gone by the board. War has become more and more a matter of mechanical arrangement. Modern battles will be decided, so far as they can be decided at all, by men lying in improvised ditches which they have scooped out to protect themselves from the fire of a distant and invisible enemy. All the pomp and circumstance of glorious war disappeared when smokeless powder was invented."

"The Future of War in its Technical, Economic and Political Relations" is the full title of Bloch's great work; and the technical chapters, even to the untechnical man, are behind no others in interest. The Boer war brought impressive confirmation of Bloch's theories. A few weeks after the war broke out he declared in a pamphlet that a superiority of five to one would be necessary to break down the first

Boer defence; this was when every one in England was confident that half the force ultimately employed would be more than enough to conquer the Boers. He told the British public that the warfare which would succeed the occupation of the Boer capitals would be vastly costlier and larger than that before. He was laughed at; but every prophecy was inexorably fulfilled. It was not the first time that he had proved a true prophet. When St. Petersburg and Moscow were planning to welcome the Russian army home after a month of spectacular war with Turkey, he told the ministers and generals amidst derision that a desperate year's effort lay before them. He knew in 1900 how unimportant comparatively artillery and cavalry are becoming; and he knew that the warfare of the future will approach more and more the conditions of guerilla warfare, in which the trained soldier will have no advantage over the quick-witted volunteer.

The fundamental change came with our Civil War. The American Civil War, Bloch shows, settled it that the alleged superiority of disciplined armies over volunteer troops amounts to nothing; the civilian soldier is as good as the regular, and often better. If this needed any confirmation, the Boer war has furnished it. The revolutionary character of this fact and its discernment can hardly be estimated. It will take years yet for the nations to grasp it; but when the man of insight has once grasped a fact, the commonalty must follow him in due course. Robert Peel divined it more than half a century ago. Instead of wasting its resources in maintaining great armies and navies, he told England, the sensible nation will rely upon its own latent energies, safely confident that if it has energies and resources it can at short notice improvise powers adequate for any necessary defence. The word finds echo in the French Assembly at this moment. "Give the nation the energy, its rights, liberty and justice," said M. Jaures in the debate on the army, "and if threatened by a foreign power the energies will convert themselves into the military virtues necessary for the country's defence." It was M. de Bloch's service that he corroborated this by the cumulative appeal to fact and new conditions, with the precision of the scientific man. He showed that the whole effort to maintain great armaments is a vain thing; that from the scientific point of view armies and navies are not a source of strength to any nation, but a source of weakness; that they do not chiefly defend, but instead drain and endanger.

From the United States Bloch drew another pregnant illustration, a reinforcement of his contention that war is usually the costliest as well as the most brutal way of settling people's quarrels. "If nations could count the cost beforehand, they would very seldom go to war. Take, for instance, the civil war in the United States of America. According to some calculations it would have cost the United States $800,000,000 to have bought up all the slaves at $1,000 a head, and emancipated them. The war occasioned the country losses of one kind and another amounting to $5,000,000,000, to say nothing of all the bloodshed and misery entailed. The cost of emancipation thus ciphered out $6,000 a head per slave instead of $1,000."

Against navies M. de Bloch inveighed as strongly as against armies. The creation of great navies was folly. We have never yet seen a great naval battle between equally matched powers. With the explosives now known to be developing, a

fleet might be instantly annihilated. With the rapid process of invention, a battleship is now hardly launched before it is obsolete. To-morrow naval warfare will become as impossible as land warfare; and already the protest against the enormously increasing navy budgets in Europe is swelling to portentous proportions. The common people everywhere are waking to the perception that their substance is being wasted in what does not profit; and the governments are now divining that the growing social discontent cannot be longer trifled with.

Marshalling all these facts, Jean de Bloch declares the end of the war system of civilized nations in sight. "They call us Utopians, idealists, visionaries, because we believe this. What is a Utopian, in the opprobrious sense of the term? He is a man who lives in a dream of the impossible; and the real Utopians to-day are those people who believe in war, preparing for it, and basing all their schemes on the expectation of it. War is no longer possible." He did not mean frontier brawls or clashes with semi-barbarous people; these may still endure for a time. "The war which has become impossible is the war in which great nations armed to the teeth fling themselves with all their resources into a life-and-death struggle." He defines himself more precisely thus: "I do not for a moment deny that it is possible for nations to plunge themselves and their neighbors into a frightful series of catastrophies which would probably result in the overturn of all civilized and orderly government. That is, of course, possible; but when we say that war is impossible, we mean that it is impossible for the modern State to carry on war under the modern conditions with any prospect of being able to carry that war to a conclusion by defeating its adversary by force of arms on the battlefield. No decisive war is possible. Neither is any war possible that will not entail even upon the victorious power the destruction of its resources and the break-up of society. War, therefore, has become impossible except at the price of suicide."

When the impossibility of resorting to war for the decision of international quarrels becomes apparent to all, or to the controlling powers, then M. de Bloch saw that other means would be devised. The old court of appeal—the arbitrament of arms—having broken down, it was necessary to constitute another, whose proceedings should not be absolutely inconsistent with economic necessity or with the need of prompt and definite decision.

"The Future of War" was published in Russian, in six volumes, in 1897; and editions in French and German, prepared under the author's own supervision, soon followed. There is yet no complete English edition; but we are encouraged to expect one,—and meantime we do have a translation of the last volume, in which the argument and conclusions are summed up, and which furnishes all that is necessary for the general reader. When the International Union was founded in Boston by Edwin Ginn, in the year of Bloch's death, to furnish to the people at trifling cost a great library of books in behalf of the peace and order of the world, this version of "The Future of War" was fittingly made the first volume in the series. One other work alone, Grotius's "Rights of War and Peace," had just claim to this preëminence. It is a misfortune and a shame that no cheap popular edition of Grotius's great work, of which Andrew D. White said at Delft in the year of the Hague Conference that, "of all works not claiming divine inspiration, that book has proved the greatest blessing to humanity," has ever yet been given to our people.

It has been commonly said that it was Bloch's powerful argument which impelled the Czar to call the Peace Conference at the Hague. Bloch himself knew better. It certainly did its part, undoubtedly a great part; it profoundly affected the Czar and his ministers. But the Czar's rescript and the Hague Conference came into being as the result of the same mighty evolutionary forces in our modern life which stirred Bloch's own mind and produced his great book.

The summoning of the Peace Conference was the occasion of profound happiness and hope to him. He came to The Hague himself, and remained throughout the session of the Conference, his great knowledge and devotion proving of inestimable service to its members. The failure of the Conference to take steps toward the reduction of the armaments of the nations was a bitter disappointment to him; but its establishment of a permanent Internation Tribunal was an inspiration and a joy indeed. Here at last was the rational Court of Appeal for which the world had groaned and travailed; and the task of the international man henceforth becomes that of so training and informing public opinion that recourse to the Tribunal for the settlement of the differences between nations shall gradually become universal, as instinctive and matter-of-course as the other legalities in good societies,—and the armies and navies shall then die a natural death.

Two years and more Bloch lived after the Hague Conference, often in London, Paris and Berlin, writing innumerable pamphlets and papers for the magazines, many of the latest drawing impressive lessons from the Boer war; addressing gatherings of trained military men, whose deferential hearing everywhere his scientific power commanded; planning the great War Museum at Lucerne, which has been opened since his death through his munificent endowment, bringing home to the very eyes of men the real character and meaning of modern warfare; and planning a vast scheme for a propaganda against militarism in Europe, a project which he did not live to carry out. It is for lovers of peace in Europe and America to take up more vigorously the work to which he devoted a life so rich in achievement, and to realize the dream which he dreamed so confidently, of a world in which war shall be no more.

THE BLOCH MUSEUM, LUCERNE